WELCOME TO THE UNITED NATIONS

When you entered the gates of United Nations Headquarters, you stepped into international territory . . .

. . . land that belongs not just to one country, but to all the countries who have joined the organization. Together these Member States have pledged to work to preserve international peace and security, promote self-determination and equal rights, and encourage economic and social well-being; together they speak for almost all the people in the world. So, WELCOME TO THE UNITED NATIONS. This is your organization. It represents your world.

As the Second World War was drawing to a close, the United Nations came into being with the signing of its Charter in San Francisco in 1945. At that time 51 nations belonged to the Organization. Over the years the membership has grown to more than three times that number, with 159 Member States in 1991.

The United Nations met in several locations before the present site was selected in 1946 as its Permanent Headquarters. Purchase of the location was made possible through a gift from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The cornerstone for the Headquarters was laid on 24 October 1949—United Nations Day—at an open-air meeting of the General Assembly; it was not until 1952, however, that meetings could actually take place in the General Assembly Hall itself.

The buildings were designed by an international team of architects, headed by Wallace K. Harrison of the United States. They include the low, domed General Assembly Building, the 39-story glass and marble Secretariat Building, and the interconnecting Conference Building. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library, was added later, built with a gift from the Ford Foundation and dedicated in 1961 in honour of the late Secretary-General. The 18-acre site is bounded on the north by 48th Street, on the south by 42nd Street, on the west by United Nations Plaza (First Avenue) and

on the east by the East River. On weekdays, weather permitting, the flags of all Member States can be seen flying along United Nations Plaza in English alphabetical order from north to south, starting with Afghanistan and ending with Zimbabwe.

The Headquarters serves four major groups: delegates, who now represent more than 160 Member States and Observers, and who send more than 3,000 persons to New York each year for the annual sessions of the General Assembly; the Secretariat staff, about 7,000 of whom work at Headquarters; visitors, who average 1,600 daily; and journalists, with about 450 permanently accredited and twice that number present for major meetings. While all these people may speak many languages, for official purposes, the United Nations uses only six—Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

The site is regarded as an "international zone"—under an agreement with the United States, it enjoys special privileges and immunities. In addition, it has its own fire and security forces, as well as its own US Government post office branch which accepts mail bearing only United Nations stamps.

Besides being able to buy UN stamps and other memorabilia, visitors who come to Headquarters can stroll through landscaped gardens decorated with sculpture from many nations, or take the guided tour and see even more artwork, gifts and exhibits at the same time that they learn about the history, structure and functions of the United Nations.

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Among the gifts in the Public Lobby are a model of Sputnik I (from the Soviet Union), a chunk of moon rock (from the United States), the Foucault Pendulum (from the Netherlands), a statue of Poseidon (from Greece), a painting, "Brotherhood" by Rufino Tamayo (from Mexico), and the Chagall window—a dramatic, blue, 15 by 20 foot stained glass panel presented in memory of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and those who died with him by UN staff members and the artist, Marc Chagall.

The United Nations has six main organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Trusteeship Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat, and the International Court of Justice. All are based in New York with the exception of the Court, which sits at the Hague, the Netherlands.

The International Court of Justice (also known as the World Court) is composed of 15 judges who are elected jointly by the General Assembly and the Security Council and who serve as individuals, not as representatives of their respective governments. The principal functions of the Court are to decide, in accordance with international law, cases submitted to it by States, and to give advisory opinions at the request of bodies of the UN.

The Secretariat, an international staff of some 16,000 men and women working at UN Headquarters in New York and in the field, carries out the day-to-day work of the Organization, servicing the other organs and administering their programmes and policies. The tasks of the Secretariat are as diverse as the activities of the Organization itself. Working mainly behind the scenes, these people are linguists, economists, social scientists, statisticians, legal experts, librarians, editors, broadcasters, and administrators. They also include clerks and stenographers, graphic artists, printers, maintenance engineers and security officers. All are considered international civil servants, meaning that they are employed by the United Nations and are not here representing their individual countries.

Heading the Secretariat is the Secretary-General. He is responsible for the work performed by it and reports annually to the General Assembly on the work of the Organization as a whole. He also has the right, under the Charter, to bring to the Security Council's attention any matter which in his opinion may threaten international peace and security. As the demands of United Nations peace-making and peace-keeping have increased, so has the role of the Secretary-General in helping reduce tensions, prevent conflicts and resolve disputes.

The Security Council is the UN organ to which the Charter gives primary responsibility for maintaining peace and security.

The Council has 15 members, five of them permanent: China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States. The 10 non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly to serve a two-year term and are geographically representative. The Security Council is the only UN organ whose decisions Member States are obligated to fulfil under the terms of the Charter. It is also the only intergovernmental body of the UN to be in permanent session; its members must be on call 24 hours a day ready to meet in the event of any crisis.

When a situation or dispute is brought before the Council, its first action is usually to recommend that the parties reach an agreement by peaceful means. In some cases, it may undertake investigation or mediation or set forth the principles for a settlement. It may also appoint special representatives or call on the Secretary-General to employ his "good offices".

If fighting has broken out, the Council's first concern is to end it as quickly as possible. It can issue cease-fire directives, impose diplomatic or economic sanctions or initiate collective military actions. It can also establish peace-keeping operations—multi-national groups of observers or military contingents who help reduce tension in troubled areas and separate opposing forces while diplomatic means of resolving the conflict are explored. These forces serve under the command of the Secretary-General and with the consent of the parties involved.

Although peace-keeping as a concept was not originally envisaged by the United Nations Charter, it has evolved over the years as an internationally accepted technique of controlling conflicts and promoting peaceful settlements. In 1988, the United Nations Peace-keeping Operations were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their contribution to the world peace over the past 40 years.

The Trusteeship Council was established with the goal of achieving independence for non-self-governing territories or colonies. Specifically, it was responsible for the eleven Trust Territories voluntarily placed under its supervision by the seven Member States who had been their administering authorities.

It is the only United Nations organ whose volume of work has diminished rather than expanded over the years. Of the original eleven, only one Trust Territory remains—the Pacific Islands of Micronesia (administered by the United States). The others, mostly in Africa, have attained independence, either as separate States or by joining neighbouring countries.

In addition to efforts on behalf of Trust Territories, the United Nations has been instrumental in promoting self-determination or decolonization throughout the world—in Africa, in the Caribbean, in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. Since 1945, more than 80 colonial territories have attained self-government or independence and the number of people living in dependent territories has been reduced from about 750 million to under 3 million.

The Economic and Social Council, with 54 members, co-ordinates the work of the United Nations and its family of programmes and agencies to promote economic and social well-being throughout the world. The Council makes recommendations, and serves as a forum for the discussion of a wide range of issues such as, the rights of migrant workers, activities of multinational corporations, and drug abuse.

Some of the UN programmes and specialized agencies who work in close co-operation with the Economic and Social Council, are the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Economic and social concerns account for a major (and growing) share of the activities of the entire UN system as well as its resources—nearly eighty percent.

The General Assembly is the main deliberative organ of the UN, where all Member States are represented and where each—large or small, rich or poor—has a single vote.

During the Assembly's regular session, held from mid-September to mid-December, the plenary (or main committees) discuss and make recommendations on virtually every issue affecting life on this planet—protection of the environment, efforts to halt the arms race, international trade and economic development, campaigns against *apartheid* and racial discrimination, respect for the principles of international law, and so on.

The General Assembly has sometimes been called the nearest thing to a "world parliament".

The General Assembly also approves the budget of the Organization to which all Member States contribute based on their national and per capita incomes. It also decides, at the recommendation of the Security Council, on the admission of new members.

It can hold special or emergency sessions when necessary, but even when not in session, the General Assembly's work is continued by special committees dealing with specific topics.

The General Assembly has sometimes been called the nearest thing to a "world parliament", because although it does not enact laws, its recommendations reflect the concerns of the international community and carry the moral weight of world opinion.

"We, the Peoples of the United Nations . . ." the Charter begins with those words. Ultimately, the key to the success of the United Nations is in the hands of the citizens of its Member States—you. It is, after all, your world.

VISITORS' INF

Guided Tours of United Nations Headquarters incl
an explanation of the aims, structure and activities o
the Organization as well as a description of the wor
of art and architectural features along the tour route
Tours leave approximately every 20 minutes seven d
a week, from 9:00 AM until 4:45 PM. Fees charged
used to defray the expense of the operation. Childre
under 5 years of age are not admitted on tours.

Special Programmes consisting of briefings by Secretariat officials and film screenings may be arranged for groups of 15 or more (high school age a above).

Official Meetings of United Nations bodies are occ sionally open to the public. Tickets are distributed fre of charge at the Information Desk in the Lobby of th General Assembly building on a first-come, first-serv basis. Meetings may be scheduled or cancelled on short notice.

The Public Concourse is located one level below th General Assembly Public Lobby. The following facilit can be found in this area:

The Public Inquiries Unit (located just off the Cor course) provides information material on United Na tions work and activities weekdays from 9:00 AM un 5:00 PM. Requests should be addressed to the Public Inquiries Unit, Public Services Section, United Nation New York, 10017, telephone (212) 963-4475.

The United Nations Postal Counter, selling UN stamps for philatelic or mailing purposes. (Letters an other materials bearing United Nations stamps may mailed from UN Headquarters only.)

The Gift Centre and Souvenir Shops, selling flags and souvenirs of the United Nations, gift items and handicrafts from Member States.

The United Nations Bookshop, with official publi tions of the United Nations and its related agencies major world issues. It also carries children's books, posters, photographs and post cards of the United Nations.

The UNICEF and UNESCO Counters, where UNIC greeting cards and stationery and UNESCO seals are available.

The Coffee Shop, open from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm daily. Service is on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Delegates' Dining Room is open for luncheon Monday through Friday. For reservations and details, inquire at the Information Desk or call (212) 963-7625.

Groups of 15 or more persons interested in making reservations for guided tours, briefing programmes, tickets for meetings, and lunch in the Dining Room should contact the Group Programme Unit, Public Services Section, United Nations, New York 10017, telephone (212) 963-4440, well in advance.

Public Transportation —the following subway trains or local buses can be used to come to UN Headquarters: take the number 4, 5, 6, or 7 train to Grand Central Station and walk east to the Visitors' Entrance on First Avenue at 45th Street; or the M15, M27, M42, or M101/102 bus. For further Transit Authority travel information, call (718) 880-1234, 24 hours a day.

United Nations